

CLIFFORD WILSON

An Interview Conducted by  
Julia Nutter

May 8, 2003

For The  
Department of Human Services  
of the  
Township of North Brunswick  
North Brunswick, New Jersey

INTERVIEW: Clifford Wilson

INTERVIEWED BY: Julia Nutter

PLACE:

DATE: May 8, 2003

WILSON: I don't know whether you're interested in anything that's in there, but I don't know.

NUTTER: Yes, I was actually just going to look in there. These are some articles here, okay.

WILSON: That picture are kids that went to--let's see, I started school in 1937. We went to school together from 1937 in Livingston Park School. This is our 50th high school reunion. Those are the kids that were there that we went all through school together. A lot of them still live in North Brunswick. I'm sure you're not interested in their names.

NUTTER: Sure. Go ahead. Tell me. Can you tell me what \_\_\_\_\_?

WILSON: Well, this girl lives in North Brunswick. She's Virginia Prevett[sp?]. She lives on Huron Road. This is Betty Szabo. She also lives in North Brunswick. This is her sister, Hanna. This fellow owned his own business. He owned Long Limousine Service; that's George Long. This is me. This lady, Lois Doller[sp?], she lives in California now. This is a picture of the street that I live on now taken, I think, 55 or 60--55 years ago. That's taken from my backyard so you can see the cornfields. And that was the

next house that was built after living--there were three houses on my street--that was the fourth house that was put up. That's what the town looked like.

NUTTER: Coud that be you?

WILSON: No, that's my nephew.

NUTTER: Okay. Wow! You are probably so packed right now with houses.

WILSON: Yes. And this is a picture from 1949 or '50. This paper is from 1979, and this was recalling old times. This is-- Where am I? I'm in there somewhere. Now that's me. This is a basketball team; we won some kind of a game or something. This fellow here was our sponsor--standing by, this fellow was our sponsor. He had a gas station on 130 when there were a few businesses on 130 at that time. He was our sponsor. The actual picture was taken like '49 or 1950 maybe. I'm not sure.

NUTTER: So this newspaper here was--

WILSON: Nineteen seventy-nine.

NUTTER: Right. It was bringing back some....

WILSON: Yes.

NUTTER: I wish they would do that more often now. That's really cool. [Rustling of papers] Kim's going to love this.

WILSON: Both my children, by the way, graduated from North Brunswick High School. I think my son, Clifford, Jr., graduated--I think he was in the first-- Nineteen seventy-six. Was that the first year of North Brunswick High School? My daughter graduated the year after.

NUTTER: Yes, I believe it was in the seventies. Yes.

WILSON: Yes, '76 and '77.

NUTTER: Let's see. Do you remember anything embarrassing that has ever happened to you?

WILSON: I'm sure there have been many, many things, where anything that stands out. That's something you would ask a big-time athlete. I really can't think of anything that was super embarrassing to me.

NUTTER: Try to keep it out of your mind.

WILSON: Maybe I did that. I've blocked it all out.

NUTTER: Okay. Moving on to religion. Describe your religious beliefs.

WILSON: I am not religious at all. I was brought up Protestant. I went to church when I was a kid. Every Sunday my mother made sure we went to church. I married a girl from St. Peter's High School, Catholic. And neither one of us are very religious at all. So we never go to church. And I think my children are-- Well, they're all grown, and I think they're the same way. Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_ on Sunday because I don't think any one of them go to church now. I'm simply not religious.

NUTTER: Okay. How old were you when you started dating?

WILSON: Well, it's hard to say what you mean by dating. Like we used to-- Like I say, I've been a musician my whole life. So I actually started playing music before I even dated. I used to play at school dances, when I was 15 or 14 even, I was already playing out. But I would say 15 or 16 I start really getting interested in girls; and when I wasn't so shy I'd ask them to dance, you know, at the local dances. We had dances at Parsons School. Once in a while at Maple Meade School. They didn't call them disc jockeys at the time; a lot of the time it was only record players. Now they have big names for them, D.J.'s.

NUTTER: Do you remember your first like date, actually going out

somewhere? Do you remember that?

WILSON: You know, I really do. If I can remember the girl's name.... But I took her to a football game. That doesn't sound romantic. And, you know, it's interesting because on the way home we were sort of mugged by a group of wiseguys, you know. We were walking down Livingston Avenue, and we were walking-- She had to catch a bus home, and I guess I had to catch a bus also. But we were walking down Livingston Avenue, and we were sort of mugged. A bunch of wiseguys attacked.

NUTTER: Oh, my gosh!

WILSON: But walking by was someone who knew the wiseguys. So he just walked over to them and started joking with them, and said, "Leave the guy alone." Stuff like that, you know. But that was my first date.

NUTTER: Being mugged!

WILSON: Something to remember, huh? But that's how we started dating: going out to school dances and things like that. I don't know how I got the nerve to ask this girl to go to the football game. I was always so shy, it didn't matter to me.

NUTTER: Let's see. Are you married?

WILSON: Yes, I am.

NUTTER: How did you meet?

WILSON: I met her at a variety show that I was singing in and she was dancing in. We were only kids like 16 or 17 or something. I think it was in Milltown. That's how I met her. And then I met her at a dance later on. And we have been married 49 years. Next year on April 13th will be our 50th anniversary. Isn't that something?

NUTTER: That's so nice. How long did you know her before you got married?

WILSON: I think we were together for five years. Yes. Four or five years, I think.

NUTTER: Describe your marriage proposal.

WILSON: Then it really didn't have to be. We really didn't have a marriage proposal because it just became a routine thing to us that we were going to get married. It was just a matter of when. I really never had to get down on my knee or anything like that. We just talked about it casually. Then finally we did it.

NUTTER: When and where did you get married?

WILSON: We were married in Milltown. I can't even remember the name of the church.... Lady of Lourdes Church in Milltown. And we had our reception--the place is no longer there, but it was called Brunswick Grove in Edison. And again, jumping back to since I was a musician, I didn't have to pay for the band because my own band played for the--only without me.

NUTTER: Oh, how cool!

WILSON: You know, they just got somebody else. So I didn't have to pay for the band. Which I have reciprocated many times over.

NUTTER: Did you have a honeymoon?

WILSON: Yes, we went to Niagara Falls. It was terrific. Got a ticket for speeding. We were going through the mountains up there, and I was behind a tractor and trailer, so I passed them. I made the bad mistake of passing him. And a cop followed me for the next five miles so he could catch me. Then he gave me the ticket, so, boy, that hurts.

NUTTER: Oh, my God!

WILSON: I think the ticket cost me \$50. And \$50 in those days, that was like 500 today, you know.



NUTTER: Oh, my God!

WILSON: They took us through some small town court, right there, live on the spot, and took us into a judge. The judge says, "Okay, you're guilty." And I had to pay the fine.

NUTTER: Oh, my God! This is on your honeymoon?

WILSON: On my honeymoon, yes.

NUTTER: Oh, my God! How many children do you have?

WILSON: Well, we had-- Clifford was my oldest, and Judy came second. My son is 45 now, my daughter's 43. And we had one son who died, the one I was telling you. He was born with spina bifida, and he died when he was 18. So we had three. I have two grandchildren now, both from my son Clifford. My daughter, Judy, is not married now. My daughter-in-law, my son's wife, happens to be mayor of Montgomery Township now, and that's nice.

NUTTER: Hmmm, that's cool.

WILSON: Yes.

NUTTER: What did you find most difficult about raising your

children?

WILSON: I guess that-- My wife was always the disciplinarian. I think my temper was too bad, although we never hit the kids or anything like that. My wife would always jump in when it came to, you know, discipline because she knew I always got too mad. But all in all, that must be it, my temper. I wasn't too calm sometimes. But all in all, the kids were well behaved. We worked with them a lot because we took them to all their township affairs and school affairs and drove them to them. They were all musicians, too. So we took them to all their band recitals and chorus things.

NUTTER: Moving on to your career. What was your first job?

WILSON: Besides the newspaper, you're talking about? When I got out of high school, I worked for one dollar an hour at the Philharmonic Television plant on Jersey Avenue. It's not there anymore. That was my first job, which I got fired from, thinking I was a wiseguy. Somebody suggested that we should go on strike and demand more money. So being a wise little high school kid, I said, "I'm for that." And they fired us all right on the spot.

NUTTER: Oh, my gosh!

WILSON: I thought for sure they'd say, "Well, we'll give you

higher wages." Fired us all, right on the spot. That was my first job. As far as the rest of my career, I've been a Teamster member. I worked for the Gates Rubber Company for many, many years. My other jobs, of course, I was a professional musician and a professional scuba-diving instructor. Those are my careers.

NUTTER: How long did you work at the Teamsters?

WILSON: I have 25 years in the Teamsters Union.

NUTTER: When did you retire?

WILSON: I retired--it's got to be ten years ago. I don't know the year, but it has to be ten years ago now.

NUTTER: You said you were in the Navy.

WILSON: That's correct.

NUTTER: How long did you serve there for?

WILSON: I was four years in the Navy, two years stationed at a naval air station in Virginia and two years aboard the aircraft carrier Ticonderoga in 1955 and 1956.

NUTTER: What were your duties?

WILSON: I had two jobs. Everybody had more than one job aboard a carrier. My main job was a metal smith. I was a welder. My other job was in the repair department; I manned a fire pump in case there was a fire on the flight deck, which we had. And I was down below decks, and I ran the fire pumps.

NUTTER: What specialties were you taught?

WILSON: In the Navy?

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: Well, that's where I was taught welding, and that's where I was taught fire-fighting. We were taught aircraft fire-fighting. If a plane-- Naturally I worked on an aircraft carrier, and I worked at an air station. So if there were plane crashes, we learned how to put out the fire from the runway. One interesting school you went to was damage-control school, where they actually put you into a mock sinking ship, and the water pouring in, and we had to keep the ship from sinking by shoring up the walls--not a comfortable or enjoyable thing to do.

NUTTER: That would make sense.

WILSON: \_\_\_\_.

NUTTER: Did you ever fight in any major wars?

WILSON: No, never.

NUTTER: How has serving in the Navy affected your outlook on life and war in general?

WILSON: I think it has affected me a lot. [BREAK FOR CELL PHONE CALL] You can answer it.

NUTTER: No, there is nobody there. I'm sorry.

WILSON: Well, it could've been mine. Mine's out in the car, though.

NUTTER: People just call it for no apparent reason. I have no idea who that was.

WILSON: But especially during this war, because the main ship in this war was the Abraham Lincoln. I knew exactly what was happening aboard that carrier because I'd spent two years aboard that carrier, and I saw planes land and take off and crash. I think the most awesome thing I ever saw aboard a carrier was when they opened up firing with all the guns on the side of the ship. The most gosh-awful thing you ever heard in your life was on that

battleship--or when a navy ship opens fire. Whew! It's the loudest, scariest thing you ever heard in your life.

NUTTER: Did you mention something crashing on the carrier?

WILSON: Oh! We had a crash one time where--I don't know whether you're familiar with an aircraft carrier, but they have cables across the flight deck, and the plane comes down and hooks onto the cable. Well, we had a plane bounce over--didn't hook on the cable and bounced over the barrier and mowed down all the guys that were in the front lining up to rescue the planes that were taking off. We had ten guys killed, and that was peace time. Well, during the Korean Conflict, but not in that area. So it just goes to show you how dangerous even day-to-day stuff is in the service. But during that we had a six-month cruise, and I think we had about 15 deaths in peace time, just aboard the carrier itself.

NUTTER: So you weren't even anywhere near the war.

WILSON: No. We had a couple of Russians ships go by us at that time, and we had to sound the general quarters just for safety's sake to be prepared. But, no.

NUTTER: Who is the person who has had the most positive influence on your life?

WILSON: Well, I'm going to have to say my wife because we've been married so long. I really don't know how my life would have gone if we weren't together. So I'd have to say my wife, although there have been others. Let's go back to John McGone who ran the recreation department in North Brunswick and New Brunswick High Schools. A great guy. As a matter of fact, he's still alive. I think he's 90 years old. Well, I'll just stop there. I'll just say my wife, I think, had the biggest effect on me.

But I will say that people don't affect me that much, if you don't mind my saying so. I mean if someone were to tell me that Queen Elizabeth was landing in New Brunswick, I would not go drive to New Brunswick to see her. Like Jimmy Carter may have been in Buccleuch Park by St. Peter's Hospital, and people were saying, "You going down to see him?" It doesn't phase me. I'm not turned on by movie stars or big-shots. It just doesn't phase me.

NUTTER: Let's see. Politically, how would you describe yourself?

WILSON: Well, I--my wife also and I--like to think of ourselves as independents. But in all honesty I find myself following the Republican Party view for some reason. As far as presidents go, I think this guy who's president now, George W. Bush, has more impact since Roosevelt. I think he's the most dynamic guy since Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

NUTTER: What U.S. president have you admired the most and why?

WILSON: Okay, I just said that I tend to be Republican. But I think Franklin Delano Roosevelt had the biggest challenges with the Depression and the big old Second World War to deal with. So I have to give him a lot of credit. And I like different presidents for different things. I think the president that I thought was the most sincere president I thought was Jimmy Carter, who was also a Democrat. He just couldn't get anything done. But as far as being sincere, I thought he had--he was the most sincere. And, of course, like I say, the president we have today, a very dynamic individual. He wakes the whole world up, this guy. Should I say more?

NUTTER: You were alive during World War II, the Koren War, and the Vietnam War. What do you remember about any of those wars?

WILSON: Well, during the Second World War and living out in the country on a farm like I did, it was such a thing that when a single airplane flew over your house, you ran outside to look up and see it, it was such a rare occasion. What I remember about the Second World War was when a whole squadron of planes would fly over. Now they didn't fly like planes do today. You know, they flew and you could see the planes. They were only maybe a mile up. And when a whole squadron of planes flew over, everybody went outside to look up and see the planes. Very, very impressive and scary.



Another thing that I remember about the Second World War was when news was so late in getting here, not like today--today you see right on the spot or the next day--in those days you know how we saw the news? We went to the movies, and during the movies they had newsreels, and they showed you things that went on the previous week in the movies. We saw it in the movies. Then, of course, we had radios. But I was only 12 years old when the war ended, and my parents weren't really worried about me being drafted. Only a couple of my brothers were already in the service.

NUTTER: So did any of your relatives fight in the war? You said your brothers.

WILSON: Yes. Right. I had one brother in the Seabees and another in the Coast Guard. Many, many--everybody was in the service. All my cousins. Anybody who was five years older than me was in the service. Very few people got out of the service in those days.

NUTTER: Where were you when you learned about the assassination of President Kennedy?

WILSON: I was working at a store in South River, in an auto parts store when somebody came in and told us that the president had been killed. So everybody right away went and turned on the radio. I guess that's one of those things that you never, ever forget. I don't know what else to say about it, but that's where I was. It

was one of those things. I remember being home when--there was a blackout. The entire area blacked out. You don't remember blackout, I'm sure. But there was a time when the entire area, from New York and all of New Jersey blacked out when a power failure happened. Which goes to show you that-- I always worry about computers, when a computer goes down or something, the problems that could arise. But something happened in some electrical thing, and the entire East Coast was blacked out.

NUTTER: Oh, my gosh!

WILSON: And I was home when that happened, too.

NUTTER: Where were you when you learned about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.?

WILSON: I think I was working for the Gates Rubber Company when I heard about that, too. I was at work again. Yes, I'm sure. I'm sure I was at work for the Gates Rubber Company at that time, Teamsters Union. That's another thing that sticks with you.

NUTTER: Do you remember how your community was affected by this?

WILSON: By those events? Well, everyone thought exactly the same: You find yourself glued to your radio or glued to your television, according to when these events happened, but there was television

when both of these things happened. And also it was very similar to when the World Trade Center. You just couldn't get away from the television. You just listened to news 24 hours a day. And I just brought up the World Trade Center. That was another happening.

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: A horrendous event.

NUTTER: Where were you then?

WILSON: You know, I was home. It was early in the morning. It must have been nine o'clock when the telephone rang. It was my sister, and she said a plane had just crashed into one of the twin towers. I said, "What? Just a small plane like a Piper Cub?" She said, "No, I think it was a regular airliner." I turned on the television, and we actually saw the second plane hit the other tower. \_\_\_\_\_. But I was home, and it was early in the morning, and I remember that, too.

NUTTER: What changes in technology have occurred in your lifetime?

WILSON: Well, starting with television. I told you the first two times that I saw television were in New Brunswick at a store, in

the window, and then at my friend's house, \_\_\_\_\_ house in North Brunswick. But, of course, you have to say so many things I can't even-- Airplane transportation. I mean when I was a kid, there were prop planes, and I did not even--I never flew 'til I was 20 years old or more. As a matter of fact, I never even left the state driving because the cars-- You have to remember you went anywhere in a car, you always had a flat tire or your car broke down. I didn't leave the state 'til I think I went in the Navy.

So I was in my twenties before I left the state. But the technology has to be-- You have to think of computers, of course. And, well, if you want to go back to the war and the technology that we have today, I mean just--this war that we just had in Iraq, I hate to say it, but there were only 130 people killed. Why, they used to kill that just dropping one bomb because they had no idea where the bombs were going. Today they can actually pinpoint a part of a building they want to hit with a bomb. So technology is absolutely tremendous. I don't know what to say about it. It's just great.

NUTTER: Moving on to North Brunswick. What made you stay here? After you grew older and had a family, why did you stay?

WILSON: My wife and I talk about this a lot, not just North Brunswick but New Jersey as a whole.

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: But we always end up saying that New Jersey is an ideal place to live. I can't think of anything that any part of the country has that New Jersey doesn't have. From seashore to skiing, lakes. I mean if was aching to get to anywhere--you can get to New York City in 45 minutes; you can get to Philadelphia in an hour. So New Jersey itself as everything. And for many, many years North Brunswick had the lowest taxes. Well, North Brunswick at one time was ideal in that there was no traffic. Of course things have changed.

NUTTER: All of the traffic now.

WILSON: Let me tell you one thing. When you go to move, it's a big thing to sell your house. My wife and I have lived in this house for so many years, and the kids say, "Why would you want to sell your house now? You've lived in it your whole life." And they have a point, they have a legitimate point. But what's pushing us now is being senior citizens. Things are getting so expensive that when you find yourself on a fixed income, if we ever thought about leaving North Brunswick, it could be now. But we're still kicking it around and surviving.

NUTTER: When you were younger, was there a sense of unity among fellow residents?

WILSON: Well, yes, I guess there was. However, we lived so far away from everybody that the only people that we ever associated with were people within a mile or two of our houses. My friends consisted of my two brothers and my friend Happy from a block away, a hundred years away I guess you'd say. We grew up on farms, but we all knew each other, everybody in the neighborhood. You knew who lived where, and everybody knew everybody else. When we went out on Halloween, everybody knew who we were because we were the only kids in the neighborhood. Oh, you're the Wilson kids, eh?

When we got older, and, like I say, North Brunswick had recreation, that was a different story. Because that was the first recreation, and we started participating in basketball games and baseball games. And we went all over to the schools, everybody-- That was really a good thing when recreation started because that was when I really started meeting kids from other neighborhoods, until finally I knew almost--you knew almost every kid in the township. As a matter of fact, you did know every kid in the township.

NUTTER: You've lived here your whole life. Do you think that over the years the township has changed for the better or the worse?

WILSON: That's a two-way street. Again, when I grew up and lived on Second Avenue, which is now Osage Road, the street was not paved. It was a dirt road. When I was a very little boy, it had no arc lights. And I used to walk on the highway, on Highway 27, and

was surprised when a car came down the road. Absolutely the truth. We used to say, "Oh, here comes a car!" And we'd turn and watch the car go by. When I was a little kid like four or five years old and a bus came down the high way, I could hear the bus coming because there were no cars. I could hear--"Oh, hear comes a bus!" And I'd go to the window to look at the bus. So to say things have changed as far as traffic and counting the amount of cars and people, I mean \_\_\_\_\_ it's bad. But I suppose there are good things, too. I mean people have to live someplace. And if they have to live, North Brunswick is a pretty darned good place to live.

NUTTER: With your neighbors, do you ever have like get-togethers with your neighbors?

WILSON: Yes, yes. Every year we have a neighborhood picnic. The neighbors--a lot of us--get together. Sometimes some can't make it. Sometimes every makes it. But almost every year we have the neighborhood picnic, and anybody who wants to come, comes. We have it in our backyard and our neighbors' backyard.

NUTTER: Last question: If you could convey one thought or idea to North Brunswick, to the entire township, what would it be? [Change to Side B of Tape]

WILSON: We had really, really good neighbors. And I didn't even

have to get to know them because I grew up with them. The girl next door went through school with me. The fellow across the street was two years ahead of me in school, and the fellow next to him was one year ahead of me in school, and the fellow next to him went to school with me through my whole life. So my whole neighborhood--I mean I know all my neighbors very well. And I'll tell you, you don't know what a benefit that is. Like if one of us would be sick, somebody would be over there cutting the grass or shoveling the sidewalk, and it works out great.

Know your neighbors. Get to know everybody you can. My wife always laughs at me because I say, whenever we're walking somewhere, I'll always say "hello" to everybody, especially to people that like I met in high school or I knew from grammar school. Then she'll say, "Where do you know that person from?" "I don't know. I met them going to grammar school." "You still say 'hello' to them?" "Yes." I don't know. Know people, get to know people.

NUTTER: Thank you very much.

WILSON: Okay. [Pause]

NUTTER: Did you have any pets?

WILSON: Over the years we had many dogs and cats. But we grew up on a farm, so we had quite a few animals: horses, cows, chickens,



many dogs.

NUTTER: Did you ever feel like you could talk to your parents about anything? Did you have an open communication with them?

WILSON: I'd say, no. Although we always got along, it wasn't the type of-- I don't know. Maybe it was the time we grew up. But I never felt like I could talk to my parents. I think it sort of may have been passed on to my children, too, because I'm not sure my children and I, although we also got along, really never got deep into anything about their lives or our lives.

NUTTER: Where did your family buy their food and clothes?

WILSON: Very interesting. When I was a kid, of course, there were no supermarkets. We lived and still live--I still live in the same house I grew up in, by the way--in North Brunswick on Highway 27, just south of How Lane. In order to buy groceries, we had to go into the City of New Brunswick, and they did their weekly grocery shopping at a place called the American Store, and I remember that. It was the closest store there was. There was a fast-food place maybe five miles, four miles from my house, that when we needed a loaf of bread, we'd ride a bike down to get it. But New Brunswick was the only stores around.

NUTTER: Interesting.

WILSON: There were no stores in North Brunswick at all that I remember.

NUTTER: It's a lot different now. They're like everywhere.

WILSON: A lot different now, yes.

NUTTER: While you were growing up, did you have any favorite childhood games?

WILSON: Well, you mean outdoor games or indoor games or it doesn't matter?

NUTTER: Any games that you used to play outside, indoors?

WILSON: Well, indoors we always played-- Well, we played cards because we didn't have TV, of course, and we listened to the radio. But we played a game that we used to call Pig with cards, a very simple game with a lot of laughs. As a matter of fact, my grandchildren play it now, and they still laugh a lot at it. But as far as outdoor games go, again, we lived in the country. We played a lot of baseball. A lot of baseball, and we always went ice skating in the wintertime or swimming in the local mud hole in the summertime. And we went to the Livingston Avenue--there was a swimming pool on Livingston Avenue when I was a real young kid,

and we used to go there quite often. And, yes, we were always active in something.

NUTTER: What schools did you go to?

WILSON: Okay, good. I started out in Livingston Park School, and I went there for a few years. Then when we went past the fifth grade, I think it was, I think we went to Parsons School, which was, of course, the old Parsons School. Those were the two schools in North Brunswick that I went to. Came the ninth grade, we went to New Brunswick School System.

NUTTER: There wasn't a high school here?

WILSON: There was no high school, no. Just--what did they call it? they called it the grammar school, I guess, in those days--to the eighth grade. Then from the ninth grade on we went to New Brunswick schools.

NUTTER: Do you remember any violence or drugs or anything at your schools?

WILSON: That was never even thought of. I can't even remember the first time I heard of anything--drugs or.... I mean we never drank alcohol or.... The worst thing we ever did was steal a cigarette and smoke it out behind the barn. But there were no drugs and

hardly any alcohol. You went to church every Sunday. It was a lot different than it is today, a lot more calm life in those days.

NUTTER: How did you get to your schools?

WILSON: I think is the most interesting thing I could ever talk about. Because I lived-- Now I live on a street called Osage Road. When I grew up, it was Second Avenue. The entire North Brunswick School System had two school buses run by the Applegate Bus Company. And they would pick us up in the morning, go around the entire township, drop the children off at all the different schools, Maple Meade, Parsons, Livingston Park, and New Brunswick High School and New Brunswick Junior High School. And so the same thing in the afternoon, the same two school buses. And when one broke down, and they had only one, they did the whole job with one school bus. Now, like I said, I live on the street where John Adams School is. And more school buses go down my street in one day than I saw in a year.

NUTTER: We have a lot of kids.

WILSON: Yes, it's amazing.

NUTTER: Do you remember a favorite teacher you had?

WILSON: Yes. My favorite teacher, I think, of all time was in

Livingston Park School, and her name was Mary Delaney. The thing I remember most of all was the way she smiled. Because when kids walked in in the morning, she had such a bright smile, and you could actually--I mean even though I was only a little kid, I could tell that she really liked the kids just from the way she looked at the kids and smiled when they all walked by. So, yes, I think she was my favorite teacher.

NUTTER: What school activities did you participate in?

WILSON: Well, in grammar school I would have to say music because the teachers in North Brunswick, Mrs. Delaney, got us all involved in music and singing. That was the first school where I learned how to play the trumpet; they taught me how to play the trumpet. As bad as I was, I kept playing, and I played my entire life from just learning how to play in the Livingston Park School.

NUTTER: That's nice. I play the trumpet, too.

WILSON: Do you really?

NUTTER: Yes, in the high school marching band.

WILSON: So I played my entire life.

NUTTER: That's great.

WILSON: I made a lot of money playing. I played out in night clubs and weddings and all that kind of stuff.

NUTTER: That's great.

WILSON: It meant a lot to me, just from them teaching me how to play.

NUTTER: Were you in any sports?

WILSON: I always played sports. In North Brunswick there weren't any organized sports except playgrounds in schools and things like that. But the organized sports in North Brunswick happened around 1949. A fellow named John McGone ran the sports department in North Brunswick, and he was also a track coach at New Brunswick High School. He came to me one day and asked me if I would run the playground at John Adams Park, you know, a summer-type program. And there were two other playgrounds: one in Maple Meade and one at Babbage Park. And I guess they also had a fellow from their local areas to run their playground.

So that's interesting that you ask that. Because we had a couple of really good athletes that came to those programs. One of the first kids that I had at the playground--I was only 16 myself--but there was a fellow named Jimmy Orso, who was a very good athlete and went on to star at New Brunswick High School and

things like that. So it was around 1949 and '50 that North Brunswick had their first recreation program. Because up until then, there wasn't anything. My mother, in her 1939 Nash--my wife always says she was the first soccer mom because she used to drag the kids all over the township to Maple Meade School because that was the only basketball court. So she used to drive us to Maple Meade School or to Parsons School to play baseball in the first recreation program.

NUTTER: Did you like school overall?

WILSON: Overall? I think I liked grammar school. But I don't know. When I got into high school, I wasn't as good in school as I was in grammar school. I don't know why. Maybe it was competition. And I was always a shy type of kid. When I got into high school, I just wasn't as good at school as I thought I was in grammar school. But I succeeded. I didn't go to college, but we did all right, and I managed to work my whole life. So I'm not complaining.

NUTTER: Do you remember any fads during your youth?

WILSON: Well, I really don't as far as fads go, you know, I don't. But when I was growing up, there was a sport that people used to play. They used to play marbles. I don't even know whether they play them anymore.

NUTTER: Sure they do.

WILSON: They still play marbles?

NUTTER: I have marbles at home.

WILSON: Do you really?

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: I always talked to a fellow across the street who was always the marble champion when we were kids. He was always the marble champion, and he went to New Brunswick High School. He became one of the star athletes in basketball and baseball and stuff like that. But as far as fads, I don't remember any fads.

NUTTER: Where did you and your friends hang out like after school?

WILSON: Well, like I say, I lived in the country, and there were no stores, there were no places to hang out. We stayed home most of the time. But I was fortunate to have four or five brothers, two of them being close to the same age. So if we weren't fighting, we were playing baseball or playing basketball. I remember when television first came out, the only place I ever saw



television, first of all, was in a store in New Brunswick.

The only other place, I remember--you know where the North Brunswick shopping center is now? Well, there was a house there, and the Currans lived there, C-U-R-R-A-N-S. And I remember going to their house and watching TV for the first time in a private residence. They said to me, "Why don't you go up and turn the dial," and I was actually afraid to turn it on. I said, "No way I'm touching that television set. I'm not going to touch it. You turn it." But, no, we never really had a place to hang out, mainly because I lived so far out in the country. I'm not saying the kids in Berdines Corners and Maple Meade--they may have had a place to hang out. There was a church in the Berdines Corners area which we would go over there sometimes, and the kids would hang out there. But that's about it.

NUTTER: Did you ever experience any discrimination at your schools?

WILSON: You mean against me or either way?

NUTTER: Any racism?

WILSON: I grew up not knowing what that meant because North Brunswick School System must have done such a good job that although we only had a few black kids--we called "colored kids" at the time--it didn't mean one thing to me. We played together and

went to school together and did everything together. I never gave it one thought. But now that I'm older and I think back to riding a bus, a public bus, I remember when I was like eight or nine years old, I'd get on the bus and go to New Brunswick. And I never gave a thought to why the black people sat in the back. I used to like to sit in the back because I was a kid, and I'd run in the back, and look out the back window.

But now that I'm older and I understand what it was all about, I couldn't understand why the black people used to stare at me when I went and sat in the back seat. But as far as North Brunswick Schools-- As a matter of fact, the New Brunswick Schools--we got along so well at that time. Now I think of the problems you're having today between blacks and whites, and I don't know. Maybe I was just naive or something, but we never had any problems between blacks and whites even in New Brunswick High School when we were seniors.

NUTTER: Was your school segregated?

WILSON: We had, I'd say, it had to be 20 percent blacks and 80 percent whites, which could be the reason why I never paid any attention. But like I say, we all got along. We played basketball on the same teams together. I really never knew there was a problem at all until I got older.

NUTTER: So race wasn't an issue?

WILSON: It was not--as far as I was concerned--not an issue at all. Maybe as far as the black people were concerned, maybe it was. But from my point of view we never cared one way or another.

NUTTER: Where have you lived as an adult?

WILSON: Well, like I say, I moved into the house that I live in right now in 1935. I was three years old. I lived there except for four years in the Navy and a couple of years in East Brunswick when someone in my family died, and we had to move into that section. Then I bought my mother's house from her. As she got older, she wasn't able to care for the house. So I bought it from her, and I've been living in the same house ever since.

NUTTER: What organizations or groups have you belonged to as an adult?

WILSON: As an adult? Well, I had one son who was born with spina bifida. I don't know whether you're familiar with that.

NUTTER: No, I'm not.

WILSON: It's a crippling disease. There was an organization for that, and I belonged to that. The March of Dimes, which was affiliated with them; they were working together. I was never into

politics. I never cared about it, and I was never into it. But I've always been a scuba diver, for many, many years. So I spend most of my time working with diving clubs and doing many dives down in the ocean, things like that, \_\_\_\_\_ ocean action.

NUTTER: What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you?

WILSON: Well, again, it's all according to what you're referring to. But among the scariest things ever was when my son was born crippled. He was born with spina bifida, which is an open spine. And we didn't know if he was going to live or not. Scariest thing ever. But if you're talking about pure fright, well, I think some of the things that happened in the Navy. I was in during the Korean War, and we had a plane crash aboard the aircraft carrier. Well, I did have-- \_\_\_\_\_. I had an incident when I was a little kid. We had a puppy, and the puppy followed me outside one day, and I didn't know he was following me, and I slammed the door and killed the puppy.

NUTTER: Oh, my gosh!

WILSON: I'll never forget that in my whole life. And, you know, I was talking to my brothers one day, and they remembered it, too. I swear I was ten years old. They didn't have the type of cellar doors that they have-- Now they have the spring-loaded door thing they didn't have then. They just had wooden doors that slammed,

and I killed the dog. A very bad experience. But all in all, I didn't have too many really scary things happen to me.

NUTTER: What are your hobbies?

WILSON: I've always been a musician. I play trumpet, I play bass. But when I quit working and retired, I haven't played those instruments since, and I'm trying to learn the piano. I have a keyboard at home, piano, and I am so bad you would not believe it, but I am learning. It is so difficult, I can't believe how hard it is to play the piano. And I am a scuba diver, diehard. I've got 2,000 scuba dives under me, almost all of them in the ocean. I still dive. I still try and dive twice a week. The fellow that I dive with is 76, and I'm 70. But it's started to catch up to us now as we get older. We have things wrong with us, and we can't make this and can't make that day. Have to go to a doctor or something. But I follow the New York Yankees. My big hobbies always have been music and scuba diving for many, many years.

NUTTER: When did you start scuba diving?

WILSON: I was around 40, so I've been diving for 30 years now. And like I told you before, as far as music goes, I started when I was like eight years old in Livingston Park School.

NUTTER: I'm just going to look at this list you have here \_\_\_\_.

So they said you had a paper route?

WILSON: That's correct.

NUTTER: How old were you then?

WILSON: I think I was like 14. Are you familiar with the Highway 27 area?

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: Okay. You know where How Lane is, right?

NUTTER: Mmmm hmmm.

WILSON: Then you go south to Cousins Lane. Are you familiar with Cousins Lane?

NUTTER: Okay.

WILSON: Well, the paper route consisted from How Lane, on 27, past Cousins Lane, just a little way past Cousins Lane. And I could not have had more than 25 or 30 papers at any one time. My brothers first had the paper route. They were two years older than I was. Then when they got into high school, I took over the paper route. I remember when I had it, the paper was 35 cents a week. I

think what is interesting is that they used to leave-- The price of the paper then was 35 cents a week, and they left it in the mailbox for me in an envelope. And you didn't worry about things being stolen or anything. So that's how I would collect my money.

NUTTER: From the mailbox.

WILSON: Yes. And in that distance where there are now literally thousands of houses, we only had 25 customers on the whole two-mile route.

NUTTER: It's a lot more now.

WILSON: Oh, it certainly is.

NUTTER: It says the Sabella[sp?] Park soccer field was referred to as the Turtle Pit?

WILSON: Yes. At one time, of course, it was all country. There were cornfields and wheat fields, and that was nothing but a field. But it was sort of indented, and there was water, and referred to it as the Turtle Pit. We'd go there and try and find turtles and snakes. Now I ride the road now, and I see that beautiful soccer field and football stadium, and that's what it was. As a matter of fact, I was pretty good friends with Joey Sabella. I don't know if you're familiar with why Sabella Park was

named.

NUTTER: Sabella Park? No, I don't know. It says that he was the first North Brunswick casualty?

WILSON: As a matter of fact, he may have been the only one.

NUTTER: In North Brunswick?

WILSON: Yes. But he was from Adams Station, and he was killed in the Korean War. A lot of things that people don't even know is that the North Brunswick teams are called the Indians and Rangers. Well, a lot of that had to do with Joey Sabella himself, because his unit was called the Rangers, I think.

NUTTER: That's cool. I had no idea.

WILSON: And that's who the park is named after.

NUTTER: That's interesting. Let's see. It says there was a small airport on How Lane, and there was a plane crash?

WILSON: Yes. I remember because the planes used to take off and sort of go right almost over my house. And I remember watching the plane. This one did not make the--I can hear it struggling. Small, one-engine planes we're talking about. And I can it. I watched it



go down across Highway 27. And so my brothers and I jumped on our bikes and rode over to the crash site. And the fellow was just climbing out of his plane. He crashed, but he landed in a field. And he got out of his plane. That was interesting. But I think when I was in around ninth grade, the fellow who owned the airport, his son--his name is Bruce Gingrich. He was killed soloing at the airport, I guess. But it was very interesting to have an airport there.

NUTTER: I didn't even know there was an airport there. That's pretty interesting.

WILSON: Well, you know where the storage sheds are now?

NUTTER: Yes.

WILSON: That's where the airport was. And it ran toward Highway 27 diagonally. It only had the one runway.

NUTTER: That's interesting. The Clark Murders? What do you remember about that.

WILSON: Well, I don't remember a lot about them except that one of my relatives was one of the policemen that were killed six months later when they found the killer. Somehow the killer turned the tables on the two policemen and killed them. One of them was

my cousin. But the Clark Murders happened only a quarter of a mile from my house. There were, I think, three or four people murdered in the house by a fellow who drove up in a taxi or something. And he got away, but six months later they caught him.

NUTTER: Did you hear about that in the papers or on the radio?

WILSON: Oh, no, no. We heard about it from police sirens and everything happening. But I was very familiar with the area because that's where I delivered papers. I delivered to those mailboxes: Dorna Clark and Quinns and Santoses and so on down the road. I used to deliver there every day. Not at that particular time.

NUTTER: Right, before. Hands Across America went right by your street. What's that, Hands Across America?

WILSON: Hands Across America was a cooperative effort of people all across the country. They tried to join hands for friendship and join hands all the way across America. I'm sure there were places that didn't make it. But we had all the way down Highway 27, as far as you could see, people had gone up to the corners and held hands. And it was very interesting because we actually had people from other states who came down, and we took them down to our house, and they all had food and drink. We were introduced to each other and met a lot of people. A very interesting time.

NUTTER: There was a huge explosion in South Amboy during the 1950's.

WILSON: No one would remember this. But when I was a kid, I was maybe 13 or 14 years old, and I was doing my homework upstairs, and all of a sudden I was knocked away from the wall. Now, this is a huge explosion. They were loading ammunition on ships, and the ship exploded. I remember my mother called up to me and said, "Clifford, you fell out of bed?" And I said, "I didn't fall out of bed." And so we quickly turned the radio on, and we found out that that explosion was so strong that it traveled up--probably came up the Raritan River, and we could actually feel the vibration in North Brunswick. It knocked me away from the wall in my house.

NUTTER: Oh, my gosh!

WILSON: And in that time, during the war, there was an ammunition plant just off of Highway 130. I remember, when I was in grammar school, whenever there was a fire at that plant--and it was called the On-Excel--they used to make us leave the building, and we'd go out on a fire drill and line up out in front of the school just in case there was a bigger explosion that would blow the windows out and you might get hurt. So the On-Excel, that was another interesting building that used to be in North Brunswick.

NUTTER: You have a piece of the goalpost from the 1947 big football game. What was that like?

WILSON: Okay. Now this-- What's interesting here is that when I heard this was going to be an interview about North Brunswick, I didn't know whether you'd be interested in New Brunswick or not.

NUTTER: Well, a lot of the people went to that high school, so....

WILSON: That's the only place they went or St. Peter's.

NUTTER: Right.

WILSON: But in 1947 I was 15. South River had the big team at that time, and there weren't as many schools as there are today. So when you played, you played bigger schools. You played New Brunswick, you played Woodbridge, and South River had the super athletic team of that time, not New Brunswick. But on that particular day, New Brunswick won the game. And it was such a big upset that they tore the goalposts down. The goalposts at that time were made out of wood. So my brothers and I, we took a three-foot piece of the goalpost, and I took it home in 1947, and I still have it 'til today in my attic. And it still says New Brunswick 7, South River 0. This was in 1947.

NUTTER: Oh, my God! That's so funny. Let's see. You said you had a party line here, 6422J. What was that like?

WILSON: Isn't that funny that I still remember that telephone number. My telephone number was 6422J, and my friend's telephone number was 6422R, and we were on the same line. And if I were to say to him, "I'm going to pick up my phone at four o'clock," he could pick up his phone, and we could talk together. But you had telephone operators at the time, and we would call someone verbally on the telephone. No dial or anything like that. And if I wanted to call him, I would say, "Would you call 'R' on this extension, please?" And the operator would dial "R."

NUTTER: So like how many people had that line?

WILSON: Sometimes three. Maybe four. At this particular time there were only the two of us that had that.

NUTTER: You said New Brunswick Drive-in Movie was very popular.

WILSON: Yes, that's when I sort of got to high school. It wasn't there when I was a little kid. But that was--I'm trying to think of what stores are there now--by Walmart. It used to be the drive-in theater, New Brunswick Drive-in Theater. And at that particular time, around 1950, the inspection station was at the same location, adjoining the movie theater. So you'd go have your car

inspected. Then if it was late enough at night, you could go to the movie.

NUTTER: It said that How Lane was Howe Lane with an "E" at the end.

WILSON: Yes, that's pretty interesting.

NUTTER: And what was that named after?

WILSON: Okay. There was a Howe, H-O-W-E, Nursery, and the only thing I could think of that Howe Lane would possibly have been named after.

NUTTER: Most likely.

WILSON: And as time went on, they changed H-O-W-E to HOW, and now it's just called How Lane. And at that particular time, I can only remember four houses on How Lane besides that nursery, one on the corner of Livingston Avenue, one on each side of the street there, and one on the corner of Highway 27 there is a house that's still there today. On my street alone there must be 30 houses now; there were three houses on my street, and three houses on the next street. And we were the only six houses for a half a mile.

NUTTER: Oh, God, it's so different now.

WILSON: Yes, it's so different.

NUTTER: Just got to turn the tape over.... [Nothing further on this tape, and no other tape which continues this interview.]